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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this Massachusetts Department of Education document is to create an awareness of, and to provide information about, adult high school credentialing programs based upon assessment of skills, which augment existing ways to earn a high school diploma. It is intended for staffs of adult learning centers, adult education programs, CETA training programs and community based educational organizations. A rationale for developing new programs is provided and the underlying need and philosophy is documented. Certification requirements are identified in terms of basic and special skills and credit for prior learning or experience. Certification requirements for four different models currently being implemented in Massachusetts are described. It explains the steps involved in the assessment process, and outlines assessment techniques. Administrative issues of staff roles, advisory committees, financing, counseling, and admissions policies are also discussed. (Author/AEF)

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GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVE ADULT CREDENTIALING PROGRAMS

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to create awareness of, and to provide information about, adult high school credentialing programs based on assessment of skills. It will be useful for staffs of adult learning centers and adult education programs, and for staffs of CETA training programs and community-based educational organizations. Secondary school administrators and school committee members interested in alternative programs for adults and youths may find it helpful as well.

It provides a rationale for developing new programs, and identifies and describes the certification requirements of four different models which are currently being implemented in the state. It explains the steps involved in the assessment process, and describes useful assessment techniques. Administrative issues of staff roles, advisory committees, financing, counseling, and admissions policies are discussed.

Educational planners can use this information to aid them in making decisions at the local level about developing similar programs for adults and out-of-school youths in their own communities.

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SECTION I

I. BACKGROUND FOR ALTERNATIVE ADULT CREDENTIALING PROGRAMS

Alternative Adult Credentialing programs provide new opportunities for competent adults to earn high school diplomas through the assessment of their learning, whether it has occurred through formal or informal experiences. These new programs provide a means to determine what knowledge and skills adults possess, regardless of the origin of learning, and officially recognize these achievements with a regular high school credential.

Both basic academic and occupational or special skills are evaluated by trained assessors using a variety of techniques, including observation of performance and documentation of skills. During this process, areas of weakness are identified and precise learning recommendations are made to assist adult learners in acquiring needed skills and knowledge. Programs assess first and then make provisions for learning suited to each individual, if it is necessary. Class attendance is usually not required.

These programs are designed to reach many people who are eligible but presently not participating in secondary adult education in the Commonwealth. They include for example, individuals who are uncredentialed because of physical disability, lack of time or money, lack of interest or poor performance while in school, adolescent pregnancy, the need to support self or family, or military service.

These programs have appeal for groups such as the homebound, the geographically or culturally isolated, and the incarcerated. Displaced homemakers, senior citizens, out-of-school youths and full-time employed can benefit, as well as adults, who for personal reasons, never completed high school. These men and woman, ranging in age from youth to old age, wish to become credentialed for a variety of economic and personal reasons. Some want a first job, a job change or a promotion. Some want further education and training or wish to take a civil service examination. Personal satisfaction motivates others to earn a diploma. Many view their lack of a diploma as a piece of unfinished business in their array of life tasks, and wish to achieve this milestone.

Credentialing adults by assessment is a process designed to augment, but not to replace, more traditional way to earn a diploma such as evening high school, the General Educational Development (GED) Equivalency Program or the return to secondary school. An assessment approach can reduce unnecessary instruction, eliminate time and attendance requirements, and increase individualization of instruction, which may increase effectiveness and reduce costs. Benefits are twofold for adults wishing to earn diplomas and for local communities wishing to expand services.

II. RATIONALE

A recent study on adult illiteracy in Massachusetts states that the general public lacks awareness of this problem[1].

The new State Board of Education Policy on Adult Education addresses this concern. It has been designed to support programs in two priority areas, basic educational attainment, including literacy instruction and secondary school certification, and work related training.[2]

This focus acknowledges that education through the high school level is essential and that training for gainful work is both an economic and societal objective.

Providing non-traditional alternatives for earning a high school diploma that are better suited to the needs of out-of-school youths and adults is one strategy for achieving these goals.

There is a compelling need at both the national and State levels to expand service and provide increased access and program flexibility for many who are unwilling or unable to use the services presently provided.

III. NEED

. The National Perspective

It is estimated that 55 million adults in the nation do not have a high school diploma.[3]

In 1975, the results of the United States Office of Education study, known as the Adult Performance Level (APL), were published. The researchers, using a variety of techniques, sampled a portion of the adult population to determine what skills and knowledge adults need to cope with the tasks of daily life.

According to the study, there are five general knowledge areas identified as necessary for effective functioning in American society: consumer economics, occupational knowledge, community resources, health, and government and law.

The functional skills required to manage information in these areas are communicative skills including reading, writing, speaking and listening, and computational, problem-solving, and interpersonal relations skills.

Extrapolating the results to the adult population at large, the APL study reported that:

- an estimated 86 million adults cannot compute the gasoline consumption rate of a car when given the necessary data;
- an estimated 52 million adults cannot correctly match personal qualifications to job requirements in classified advertisements;
- an estimated 48 million adults cannot determine the correct amount of change from a purchase when given a cash register receipt and the denomination of the money untilized;
- a projected 39 million adults cannot interpret an earnings statement well enough to find the deduction for Social Security;
- at least 23 million adults lack important functional competencies and 34 million more are functional but not proficient in these skills.

. The State Perspective

Here are some facts pertaining to illiteracy and undereducation in this state.

Adult Illiteracy in Massachusetts

1. About 1/3 of adults over 25 do not have diplomas. Although Greater Boston (central city) has the largest population in need (502,368 or 38%), the need for service is statewide. In Springfield, for example, 247,783 or 19% of the population is without a high school credential[4].

2. While 41.1% of all heads-of-households did not have a high school diploma in 1969, 62.4% of poverty-level heads of households were without a high school diploma (based on 1970 census data). Poverty status is strongly related to low educational attainment levels[5].

3. At least 46.5% of mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) were undereducated (i.e., did not have a high school diploma) in 1977 (estimated), reflecting a relationship between levels of educational attainment and indices of economic dependency, such as welfare status[6].

4. In 1977, 69.3% of [illegible]mates in the custody of the Department of Corrections had no high school diploma, illustrating the relationship between low levels of educational attainment and incarceration for criminal activities[7].

5. In 1970, according to the census data, 41.1% of family heads of the Massachusetts labor force had no high school diploma. This level of educational attainment severely limits entry into the labor force in the state which increasingly needs skilled people for jobs in technology[8].

6. The costs to Massachusetts of not educating the population of 712,334 illiterate males, 25 years and over, who had completed less than 8 years of schooling as reported in the 1970 census are estimated at:
   13.3 billion dollars in foregone income over the lifetime of the men, and
   1.49 billion dollars in foregone tax revenues to Massachusetts computed at an 11.8% State-local tax rate[9].

Thus, the lack of 12th grade educational attainment and the high school credential which recognizes this achievement is related to economic status and dependency, to un/or under-employment and to incarceration. In addition, there is evidence of a strong relationship between the amount of schooling received by parents and their children's achievement in schools and the tendency to drop out[10]. Further, occupational mobility is affected by low educational attainment and the estimated costs of loss of income to both individuals and to the state are substantial.

Conclusion

Present adult secondary programs do not seem to attract the large number of potential candidates. Barriers to participation generally include heavy family and work responsibilities which affect scheduling, lack of time and energy, aversion to "school" as an unseemly adult activity unrelated to real life problems, fear of the inability to learn, and negative attitudes towards lock-step, authoritative education.

Although having a diploma is no guarantee of obtaining a job or gaining access to higher education, not having a diploma can be a barrier in acquiring a job, being promoted, or entering post-secondary programs.

New adult credentialing programs are designed to alleviate many problems adults have that are related to the traditional academic organization and structure, as well as the academic content, of learning. By concentrating on the assessment of individuals' skills regardless of their origin, the importance of both informal and formal learning is recognized.

IV. PHILOSOPHY

Characteristics of Adult Learners

The developing theory of adult education (andragogy) is concerned with the differences which are characteristic of children and adults in the areas of teaching and learning. The technology of children's learning dominates the organization and structures of primary and secondary schools, but its usefulness to adult learners is often questioned.

Chiefly, adult learning theory as conceived by Knowles[11] is based on the assumption that there are definite differences between adult and child learners including differences in self-concept, experience, readiness to learn,and orientation to learning. Briefly, these four characteristics state that:

1. A mature person is independent and self-directed. This means that there must be *mutual responsibility* in diagnosing, planning and assessing educational experiences between the learner and the staff of adult programs.

2. Adults learn best when teaching and testing methods are *based on* their broad range of daily *experiences*, because they actually participate in work, family and community life. So independent work, community projects, simulations, discussions and case studies are more appropriate instructional strategies than large group class learning and learning through formal courses, in many instances.

3. Adults are concerned with their roles as workers, spouses, parents, and citizens. Accordingly, *practical content* based on adult life performance is more appropriate and of higher interest to them than academic material.

4. Adults intend to apply immediately what they learn (youths tend to postpone application of what they learn). So adults' perspectives on learning are immediate and *problem-centered*, (rather than subject-centered and future-oriented, as are youths).

Programs for adults, planned on the basis of these particular characteristics of adult learners, should stress shared responsibility for learning between adults and their teachers, be based on adult experiences which emphasize practical content as the basis for learning and testing, and stress *application* and *integration* of knowledge for immediate use.

Additionally, adults are busy people. They have responsibilities to families, jobs and to their communities. Flexible structures and programs should be designed with this reality in mind. Educational experiences must be designed to fit the schedules of adults, to insure participation among groups presently not reached by more traditional structures.

Characteristics of Adult Credentialing Programs

If the characteristics of adult learners are used as guidelines in developing new credentialing programs for adults and out-of-school youths, true alternatives to present practices emerge. The following suggestions link Knowles' theory of adult learning with its practice. New credentialing programs are designed to:

Enhance independence and self-direction by:

- Requiring no specified seat time, or attendance in classes, but instead create open admissions, open exit policies to provide assessment services to adults on a year-round basis.
- Stating graduation requirements explicitly as competency statements, rather than as credits or units, so that adults know precisely what specific skills and knowledge they must demonstrate to earn a high school diploma.
- Providing multiple opportunities for assessment and instruction to assure unlimited chances for success.
- Creating individualized counseling and planning services which actively involve the adult learners in the education process and ensure that they are responsible for achieving their own learning goals.
- Assessing skills first, for diagnosis, and recommending instruction *only if it is needed or desired by the learner.*
- Using non-secure assessment techniques so that individuals are always aware of what skills they will be required to demonstrate, by what methods, and by whom will they be assessed. Written criteria for evaluating their performance is available to them for examination.

Utilize adults' experience by:

- Assessing skills through actual performances judged by trained assessors rather than paper and pencil testing.
- Recognizing and rewarding occupational and vocational skills and basic skills used in daily life, rather than only school-related academic skills.
- Rewarding the demonstration of competence, regardless of the origin of learning.
- Using experts from the community to establish standards for occupational performance and to assess performance.

The following chart describes features of adult credentialing programs in relation to characteristics of adult learners.

Adult learners are:	Adult Credentialing Programs:
· mature, independent, self-directed*	encourage responsibility for both self-assessment of skills and for learning stress self-directed study, take home exams, and self-paced progress state graduation requirements and standards explicitly as statements of competence offer multiple opportunities for testing and learning
· experienced* in family, work and community life	use action techniques of assessment, applied performance, product and process assessment, and documentation use performance-based measures related to experience emphasize action learning, projects, simulations, and use of community resources to learn reward occupational/vocational skills
· ready to learn* to improve as workers, spouses, parents, citizens	focus on practical content of testing and learning, organized around areas of work, home and community life experience
· ready to apply new learning immediately*	emphasize problem solving, and application of basic skills to daily life functioning stress practical content and skills
· busy with home, work, and community life	require no attendance or classes for certification offer flexible assessment schedules offer open admission, open exit, year-round counseling and assessment assess first, instruct only if necessary
* From Knowles, Malcolm, Washington, D.C. 1969	*Higher Education in the United States*, American Council on Education

V. SUMMARY

In summary, adult credentialing programs are designed to augment, but not to replace, traditional ways to earn a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, such as completion of requirements in evening high schools or through achieving a successful score on the GED test. Programs are designed so that trained staff assess and record skills possessed by competent adults and out-of-school youths, regardless of the origin of learning.

This process promotes the self-esteem of participants because it identifies their strengths in both basic academic and special skill areas. At the same time, participants are aided in discovering both skill weaknesses and the resources needed to remedy specific deficiencies. They learn who in their community might teach them needed skills, and where to go to learn them.

The characteristics of adults are considered in the design and administration of programs. Emphasis is on the demonstration of skills in practical contexts. In addition, the flexible scheduling of assessment is better suited to adults' busy schedules and myriad responsibilities.

In developing new programs, planners will need to decide:

1. What population is to be served by the new program and why is it needed?

2. What assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners serve as the philosophical foundation of the program?

3. What are the general objectives and intended outcomes of the program?

SECTION II

I. CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

In Massachusetts, graduation requirements for in-school youths vary from community to community. For example, 16 Carnegie units distributed in areas of Mathematics, English, Social Studies, U.S. History, and Physical Education might be required in one town, while in another community, 80 credits distributed in some other fashion must be earned. There is no single set of carnegie credit or requirements that applies to in-school youths throughout the state. Adults seeking a credential meet requirements that may or may not be the same as those for in-school youths. Here are two different ways in which adults presently earn credentials in Massachusetts.

1. Evening High School - adults return to evening high school after an absence. They generally complete the same requirements as in-school youth in that community. The diploma is awarded by the local education authority.

2. Equivalency Certificate - adults pass the General Educational Development (GED) tests and earn an equivalency certificate. They take five tests in subject areas of Writing Skills, Social Studies, Science, Reading Skills and Mathematics. The certificate is awarded by the State Education Department. The requirements for earning a GED certificate are based on:

    - Knowledge of the material required by the test items as indicated by earning passing scores, (an overall average of 45 in all five tests for a total score of 225 or over; and no score under 35 on any test).
    - Residence (at least six months preceeding the award of the certificate)
    - A minimum age of participation (16 years or older). Persons 16, 17, or 18 years of age will receive the Certificate once the individual's original school class has graduated.
    - *Not* currently enrolled in public or private school.

New adult credentialing programs may adopt local school requirements for certification or create a new set of requirements specifically for the adults they serve, with the approval of the local school authorities. High standards are maintained in order to preserve the integrity of the diploma.

Generally, attainment in two major content areas is assessed: *basic academic skills* and *special skills.*

BASIC ACADEMIC SKILLS

- Basic skills—attainment to specified standards is required. Skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking and problem-solving in areas such as health, citizenship and legal information, self awareness, consumer skills, occupational and social awareness must be demonstrated.

SPECIAL SKILLS

- Special skills—achievement to specified standards is required. A variety of possible areas are acceptable for credit. These might include skills in an occupation or an avocation, or college readiness, or knowledge and skills gained through management, travel, or military experience, for example.

Adult credentialing programs emphasize specific requirements which are appropriate for adults in their communities. Research on adult functional competence is available to guide selection. And exemplary adult credentialing programs share their requirements in answer to requests. A review of graduation requirements from these varied sources should be undertaken by planners of new programs, and decisions made by a representative body from the community. The basic skills competency lists developed by the state might be used as guidelines for developing new requirements for adults.

CREDIT FOR PRIOR EXPERIENCE OR LEARNING

The recognition of skills learned through experience is a vital component in all non-traditional diploma programs. Two predominant philosophies result in two different assessment practices, and two methods for awarding credits.

II. CREDIT FOR PRIOR EXPERIENCE

- Credit for prior experience - this is similar to the award of credit for academic attendance. The underlying assumption is that an experience itself was valuable and contributed to one's education. Therefore, military experience, travel, and prior course work can be credited. Documentation might include discharge papers, essays about, or photographs of, travel, and transcripts from other institutions which verify that courses have been taken, in the French language, for example. Both high school credit earned at an earlier time, and other experiences deemed educational might be evaluated and assigned a credit weight.

III. CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

- Credit for prior learning - the underlying assumption is that experiences develop knowledge and skills which presently exist and can be assessed. Therefore, skills learned in the military (i.e., typing, welding), through travel (language ability, ethnic cooking), and prior course work (French language) can, and will, be assessed for credit by experts through applied performance tests.

The advantage of crediting prior *experience* is that most adults have participated in some activity which can be determined to have been worthwhile and can be documented. The disadvantage is that the specific learning outcome is not identified and no current assessment verifies these skills. For example, having taken French five years ago is creditable, regardless of whether any ability to speak or write the language remains.

The advantage of crediting prior *learning* is that current skills are assessed by an expert. A high school French teacher might conduct an oral and written exam to assess current language ability of a candidate. This approach might be time-consuming, but it is a more accurate measure of achievement. A business teacher might assess typing and a local construction worker, welding.

ESTABLISHING REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT CREDENTIALING PROGRAM

Requirements for certification are usually established in one of three ways: invoking existing state or local requirements or creation of new requirements, through consensus of an advisory committee (using research data from existing programs), with the approval of local school boards and the state if it is necessary.

In Massachusetts, there are no state level requirements for high school certification which apply to adults. Local requirements for credentialing prevail.

At the discretion of the local education agency, requirements for credentialing can be modified to better reflect the needs, concerns and abilities of adults. For example, if a program wishes to credit a range of experiential learning as part of its requirements (such as skills as an auto mechanic), approval from the local diploma granting authority is all that is required.

Of course, the reasons for offering such an alternative and the population for whom it is appropriate would be stated in printed materials distributed to the community. This program's philosophy, rationale and description must be made available, as well as information on all other alternatives such as the GED program, ABE instuction and evening high school courses. As a result, the range of choices in each community for earning a credential will be well publicized through brochures, flyers and other media.

Four Models

The following charts compare the requirements for certification for four well-established adult credentialing models; two competency-based programs (New York and Texas) and two credit-based programs (New Bedford, Massachusetts and New Jersey). They are presented as examples of certification requirements which work well for these programs.

Clearly, the programs reflect a concern for basic academic skills, but they also acknowledge facets of adult life different from that of children and youths in their stress on occupational and other skills more directly related to adult life.

The requirements for certification do not represent a watering down of graduation requirements but rather a different focus and emphasis. Adult experience is broad and skills are learned through a variety of experiences including family and work roles, community service, travel, on-job training and in military service. Therefore, assessment is focused on problem-solving rather than simply on recall of subject-centered knowledge, and on performance of skills to written standards, not on attendance.

CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR FOUR PROGRAM MODEL

NAME	BASIC SKILLS	SPECIAL SKILLS
* Texas Competency-Based High School Diploma (CBHS) (State approved requirements)	Must score satisfactorily on: 1. Content area measures and APL Survey 2. Satisfactorily complete Life Skills activities	And demonstrate 1. a marketable job skill or 2. college or vocational school readiness or 3. skills in home management/ maintenance
* New York State External High School Diploma (XD) (State approved requirements)	Must demonstrate (with 100% accuracy) 64 competencies in 7 areas, including: communication, computation, self-awareness, social, consumer and scientific awareness, and occupational preparedness.	And demonstrate 1. occupational/vocational skills, including home management or 2. college readiness skills or 3. special skills (community work, art, music, etc.)

*Member, National Diffusion Network of the United States Office of Education

New York Model

The New York State External High School Diploma Program
405 Oak Street
Syracuse, New York 13202
Telephone: 315—425-5259

Contact: Norma Feldman
Coordinator

Texas Model

The Adult Performance Level Competency-Based High School Diploma Program
Division of Continuing Education
Education Annex 5-21
University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas 78712
Telephone: 512—471-4623

Contact: Elaine Shelton
Coordinator

CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR FOUR PROGRAM MODELS

NAME	BASIC SKILLS	SPECIAL SKILLS
New Bedford Adult Diploma (AD) (locally approved requirements)	All six required to earn seven credits 1. read at high school level 2. math exam 3. writing, grammer and spelling exam 4. United States History course 5. take a 12 week course and a 12 week independent study 6. earn 16 credits in total	Eleven options to earn nine credits employment 4 credits; home management 4 credits; training programs 4 credits; practical arts 3 credits; fine arts 3 credits; military service 2 credits; family health and education 2 credits each; second languages 2 credits; volunteer experience 2 credits; independent project 1 credit; sports recreation and travel 2 credits
New Jersey Adult High School (AHS) (State mandated requirements)	All three required 2. United States History 10 credits 3. 10.5 grade level in reading, math and English (Test of Adult Basic Education, TABE)	Options to earn credits military experience 10 credits; on-job training and apprenticeship; up to 5 credits in each area, assessed by a specialist

New Bedford, Massachusetts Model

New Bedford Adult Diploma Program
181 Hillman Street
New Bedford, MA 02740
Telephone: 617—999-3012

Contact: Elaine Feingold
Supervising Diploma Consultant

New Jersey Model

Adult Diploma Program
Monmouth Adult Education Commission (MAECOM)
1 Main Street
Eatontown, New Jersey 07724
Telephone: 201—542-3224

Contact: Mr. Thomas R. Niles
Coordinator

It is possible for communities to either adopt or adapt any of these programs. A decision to adopt an established model includes having staff trained in assessment procedures and policies, and using materials and record-keeping systems developed by the original model. Since these assessment systems are actually testing programs, adopters are asked to follow standard procedures for one year. Then assessment variations suitable to local needs can be integrated into the original design where appropriate.

Adaption generally includes making alterations in the policies and procedures of the original model during the design stage, based on information about the population needs of the community and/or the requirements of the sponsors. Decisions about what techniques and policies to use or vary are made by staffs of the new programs and those of the original model.

Contact directors of programs directly to discuss which strategy they recommend for their program, adoption or adaption. Addresses and telephone numbers of directors are listed in Appendix I.

Two programs, the New York State External High School Diploma Program and the Texas Competency-Based High School Diploma Program, have been reviewed and evaluated by the Office of Education and the National Institute of Education. Each has met the rigorous examination of a panel of experts and is a member of the National Diffusion Network,[12] an organization responsible for the dissemination of good practice in education.

Adopting these programs involves a contractual agreement with the programs for staff training in the particular program. Technical assistance is provided through the National Diffusion Network to adopters throughout the country. The responsibilities of adopters include contributing information on the local program to the data bank operated by the New York and Texas programs.

Since the development of valid and reliable adult credentialing programs can be an expensive and time-consuming process, there are advantages in adopting a tried and true model. Communities may want to adjust these programs to better fit their specific populations, after a trial of at least a year. If communities are interested in adopting or adapting a model, there are some important issues to consider.

Here are more questions that planners should ask:

1. Is the assessment process reliable and valid? Ask for documentation and review typical candidates' portfolios.

2. Is the program truly appropriate for adults and a real alternative to existing offerings in the community? Carefully review the entire program.

3. Is the cost of adoption reasonable? Training costs and materials costs vary, but anything over a one time fee of $5,000 for the training of staff and the purchase of materials is excessive.

4. What technical assistance is available to adopters?

5. What commitment to the original program must be made when an adoption is planned?

Setting Standards

As well as identifying the requirements (what content areas will be assessed), the levels of performance (the depth of knowledge and the degree of accuracy required) must be agreed upon.

Rigorous but fair standards for performance are the key to good assessment. There are at least three decisions involved in setting standards: who sets the standards; what information guides their choice; how are standards maintained?

Clearly, local communities must be involved in setting standards which are appropriate for adults. Participation by school authorities and local employers is important when decisions about basic and occupational skills standards are discussed. For example, auto mechanics courses in high schools may require students to learn different knowledge and skills than are actually needed or used by mechanics in local repair shops; so standards differ at the school and work site. Mutual agreement between professionals from both sites helps to ensure the use of realistic criteria for judging performance. Agreement comes from discussions between vocational teachers and community professionals, and written standards serve as guidelines.

As a rule, admissions officers from local community colleges and universities should participate when college readiness standards are identified. The process of setting standards should include representation from these sectors and perhaps some typical candidates, as well.

Decisions about standards should be based on research, using adult performance levels as guidelines, as well as standards available from exemplary adult programs. Local standards and state guidelines for basic skills may be useful too. Setting standards is never entirely objective, but existing data on typical adult performance can guide decisions.

Once standards are set, there must be efforts to maintain them. Several procedures help to ensure quality. An appropriate official or group should be designated to monitor assessment procedures, and a review procedure established. Guidelines for these procedures must be written. Periodic checks will ensure that policy guidelines and procedures are carried out. To ensure reliability, consistency of assessment is essential. In addition, program effectiveness measures should include a periodic review of standards. Alternative adult credentialing programs are as creditable as their standards.

Program planners will have to decide:

1. What basic skills and special skills will be required to earn a diploma?
2. Will credit be given for prior experience or prior learning, or both? In what subjects or content areas?
3. What is the form of credit given (Carnegie units or credits, competencies, or both)? How many must be earned?
4. What is the basis for setting standards? What do local employers and industry require? What does higher education require?
5. How will standards be maintained?

IV. ABOUT ASSESSMENT

Assessment of skills is the main activity of adult credentialing programs. Trained staff evaluate the candidate's basic and special skills in content areas selected for certification. Appropriate documentation of performance is required. Judgments of the credits or competencies are made by assessors, and recorded. When sufficient competencies are demonstrated or credits earned, a diploma is granted.

Techniques

There are a variety of techniques used to document skills.[13]

- *Applied performance tests:* these are hands-on tests administered in a natural or controlled environment. The tailoring skills of a home sewer might be assessed either in a local tailoring shop or in the sewing center of a local adult education program.

- *Simulations:* these are similar to performance tests because they replicate "real life" situations. Role playing and case studies are simulations. Demonstrating job interviewing skills through role playing or preparing a family budget using information from a case study are examples.

- *Interviews:* either structured or unstructured questions can be asked through conversation and discussion. Interviews are particularly good ways to evaluate communication and interpersonal skills. Persons can be asked to demonstrate listening skills, for example, by listening and responding to taped messages.

- *Product assessment:* objects made by the candidate can be evaluated as evidence of skills. A photography portfolio, paintings and sculpture, items of clothing and carpentry items are examples of products that can be assessed.

- *Self-assessment:* this technique requires an individual to evaluate his or her level of achievement. For instance, using a checklist of functional competencies, persons will rate those which they can do well or those in which they need help.

- *Essays and reports:* these can be structured around a particular theme, or unstructured, permitting persons to document specific skills as well as demonstrating writing ability.

- *Documentation:* this can be evidence of an experience or a skill. Documentation takes a variety of forms such as transcripts of courses completed; or military experience; letters from employees; licenses and membership records; voters' registration cards and library cards. All can be used as confirmation of candidates' skills.

Decisions about which technique to use to assess a particular skill are affected by several factors. These include:

- The availability of prepared assessment checklists, applied performance tests and observational criteria for evaluation of both products and performances.
- The expertise of the staff in developing new assessments, for the application of math and writing skills, for example.
- The degree of reality in assessment that is considered necessary to evaluate adequately the skills of adults, and the feasibility of so doing.

Well-established models of adult credentialing such as those described in this document have policies, materials and guidelines for the use of these techniques. Their training programs teach others to use their methods.

Record-Keeping

It is customary to use the portfolio method of record-keeping. All demographic information and assessment materials are carefully bound into a manila folder for safe keeping. This completed record of the candidate's achievement is evaluated by the assessors and is available for review by others involved in the assessment process. Usually, portfolios are stored at the assessment site for an indefinite period.

An orderly approach for gathering demographic information, progress reports and data for evaluation is necessary. Forms for registration, student progress, and learning recommendations are kept. The success of recruiting efforts, follow-up data on graduates, and other relevant information necessary to revise and improve the process is gathered.

Transcripts which record learning objectives deserve particular attention, because employers and institutions may request them. Essential elements are a description of what competence was earned, and the level of learning. Some models list the name and address of a community craftsperson, if that person was involved in the assessment, and include a description of the program.

Process of Assessment[14]

Regardless of the choice of techniques used to assess a candidates' skills, there are basic steps involved in the process. These are described briefly:

Counseling and orientation

- Counseling and orientation - in this step all available options to earn a diploma and the requirements for each are explained to the prospective candidates. Information about evening high school, regular day school, and GED programs are explained, as well as the requirements for the new program.

Diagnostic testing

- Diagnostic testing - next, all required skills are evaluated to establish levels of performance in basic academic and special skills for the candidates' information and for planning specific instructional or evaluation activities to improve deficiencies.

Assessment of Skills

- Assessment of skills - in this step, documentation of learning through prior experience is assembled, or current skills are evaluated to the written standards for performance

Instruction

- Instruction - needed skills are learned by a variety of strategies: informal or formal classes and/or independent study; use of existing adult education programs; CETA training programs; and community resources such as libraries and museums

Re-assessment

- Re-assessment of skills - this step follows instruction, as necessary

Credentialing

- Credentialing - last, after all requirements are satisfied, local school authorities grant a regular high school diploma to successful candidates.

This process takes variable amounts of time; four months from enrollment to certification is usual in many programs. The time may be longer or shorter, depending upon the level of the individuals' skills and the design and requirements of the program. Persons are usually working and meeting family and community responsibilities as well as participating in assessment, and programs are self-paced and flexible to accommodate this.

Role of Assessor

Because careful assessment is the key to valid and reliable alternative credentialing programs, the assessors are key personnel. Their responsibilities include the following activities:

- Assess basic skills competencies, using a variety of techniques
- Assemble appropriate documentation for employee verification of occupational/vocational skills
- Assemble appropriate documentation of college readiness or special skills
- Develop occupational skills check lists with community experts for on-site occupational performances
- Prescribe learning experiences for candidates in skills areas where they need help
- Complete competency progress reports after each assessment session
- Schedule assessment appointments to maintain an even work flow
- Control for reliability of assessment by reviewing evaluations with another assessor
- Determine competency or credit awards
- Assemble all documentation required to complete a portfolio and verify that the content meets the standards.

Assessors learn to do these activities by attending training sessions in which they evaluate actual evidence submitted by candidates. Training programs are generally conducted by developers for communities which adopt existing exemplary programs.

For example, the administrator of a program which adopts the Texas APL diploma program will be trained in program administration in Texas for several days. The staff at the adopter site will be trained by this administrator. The NYXD program trains assessors in a week-long program (and administrators for a day) in New York or at program sites. Training programs for adopters usually occur several times a year.

Although the backgrounds of assessors may vary, all have had experience in the field of education and most have had experience with adult learners prior to this special training. Assessors need good general academic and organizational skills and a flair for detail. They also need good listening skills and the ability to make fair evaluations in a warm and supportive manner.

Assessors may be full or part-time staff, depending upon program resources and on the need for service. They need not by certified teachers.

An effective assessment program depends, then, on clear written criteria, the use of a variety of assessment techniques, and on the judgments of trained assessors.

Community Assessors

Programs which include assessment of occupational or vocational skills usually seek help from the community in evaluating candidates with these skills. Assessors are trained to evaluate basic skills, but cannot be expected to assess specific occupations (i.e., home manager, auto mechanic, beautician, butcher, water plant operator). Nor have they the expertise to evaluate avocational skills in such areas as photography, music, dance, art, or handicrafts. Yet most communities have a host of crafts persons and professionals knowledgeable in the entry-level standards for their own occupations and willing to share their expertise, given appropriate training.

The use of community persons to assess special skills is assurance that high standards are maintained in programs that recognize and evaluate occupational and vocational skills.

Program planners will need to decide:

a. What kinds of assessment techniques will be used?

b. What kinds of documentation or evidence are legitimate and acceptable as proof of skills? How much evidence is required?

c. What process does the assessor use to determine whether the documentation offered by a candidate meets the requirements?

d. How and by whom is the quality of assessment (reliability) maintained?

e. What qualifications, background and training are necessary for assessors who assess basic skills? For community-based assessors?

f. What training will assessors need to acquire, and how will they receive it?

About Instruction

Although the primary concern of adult credentialing programs is assessment, instruction must play a strong part, too. It must be available to help those with deficiencies identified through the assessment process.

When a candidate has completed the diagnostic step, very specific information becomes available about his or her basic and special skills. Using this information, a learning prescription is written which is tailored to the individual.

This prescription may recommend that the candidate review how to write a business letter, paying particular attention to the format. Or, certain math functions such as finding the area of a rectangle need to be learned. A program to improve reading skills may be outlined. Perhaps a more extensive recommendation is made-that an occupational skills training program be entered because the person needs to learn a marketable skill.

Learning prescriptions are the basis for short or relatively long-term educational planning between the learner and a counselor. The concept of educational brokering becomes important here, because candidates are referred to places where they can obtain the necessary instruction. The referral might be to an adult learning center, nearby in the same community, and to an evening high school program or a CETA training program. Study with a family member or a volunteer tutor, or at home might be suggested as well as learning at a job site or through a correspondence course.

A counselor, acting as an educational broker, informs candidates of the various learning opportunities available in the community. It is the responsibility of the candidates to do the brushing up on new learning necessary for them to bring their skills up to the standards established by the program. Since candidates approach the instructional task with a clear idea of what it is they need to learn and how they need to learn and how they will demonstrate it, the time needed for learning is reduced. The task is more manageable. Clear objectives enhance the motivation for completing the learning recommendations at a site or sites chosen by the learners.

In short, to complement the assessment programs, instruction should be tailored to the learning prescription. When the learner can demonstrate that he or she has mastered the requirement to the standard, learning has been confirmed. Therefore, performance, not attendance in a class, becomes the basis for the award of credits or competencies.

Program planners will have to decide:

a. What kinds of instruction are available in the community that could complement an adult credentialing program?

b. What process will be used to link learners with instructional experiences in the community?

c. Who will act as "broker" for learning?

V. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Staffing

Adult credentialing programs can be administered by existing personnel or by new staff hired for this purpose. Either adult education, CETA programs, or cooperative adult education and CETA programs are appropriate sponsors. In any case, special training is necessary for those who will assess both basic and special skills, because assessment is a detailed and specialized activity. Staff development for administrators and clerical staff is also necessary to ensure that all are aware of the demands and responsibilities of the new program.

Assessment programs can be run on a part-time basis. Experience shows that candidates (whose skills are assessed *by appointment*) prefer morning hours (9:00 a.m. to noon) and late afternoon and early evening hours (4:00 to 8:00 p.m.). Provisions for Saturday morning assessment can also be made. Because assessment is individualized and by appointment, costs of assessment are based on actual contact with candidates.

Staff selection will depend on local hiring policies. Since assessors do not teach, it's not necessary that they be certified. However, persons doing this job need good educational backgrounds *plus specialized* training in assessment.

Staff might consist of a part-time administrator/counselor, two part-time assessors, and an administrative aide. The responsibilities of the assessor have been described.

Typically, the administrator/counselor is responsible for at least these activities: coordinating activities of sponsors and the advisory committee, overseeing intake activities and conducting orientations to inform about credentialing alternatives, and administering, counseling and interpreting diagnostic materials to candidates, plus advising on learning strategies. They also coordinate program and public relations activities, and conduct program evaluations.

The duties of the administrative aide include maintaining all records, assembling and maintaining portfolios of student work, and typing, phone and mail duties. Aides also score diagnostic tests, mail results to candidates and prepare weekly and monthly reports.

Although staff has day-to-day responsibilities for program implementation, others have significant, if less time-consuming roles. These include the advisory committee, the school superintendent, the local school board and other sponsoring agents.

The Advisory Committee

Representatives from local business, industry, unions, CETA, community colleges, adult learning centers and school administrators serve as an advisory committee to the program. These dozen or so people, appointed by the project director, should have several characteristics, including interest in and commitment to adult education, the time and willingness to serve, openness and tolerance for change and innovation and local credibility in some area of expertise. Selection of the advisory committee should be guided by achieving balanced representation in such factors as age, sex, race, experience and community standing.

The duties of the advisory committee include review of, and recommendations for, program operation, linkage to the community to create awareness and acceptance of the program, public relations activities, recruitment, and the dissemination of information.

The effectiveness of any advisory committee is measured by its understanding of the goals, policies and procedures of the new program, so training for members must be provided in order for them to understand their new role. The project director can involve the committee in planning, decision-making, evaluation and public relations activities, but should emphasize that the committee's participation is advisory. The committee can meet quarterly, work from planned agendas distributed beforehand and keep minutes of each meeting.

The benefits of a well-selected and well-organized committee include continuing support of key community members and program acceptance.

The Superintendent and the local school committee

These persons have important roles in approving and supporting the new program, assuming public relations responsibilities and, of course, issuing the high school diplomas.

Other sponsoring agents

Agents which implement programs such as CETA (Comprehensive Employment Training Act) have an interest in supporting adult credentialing programs. CETA legislation calls for assisting eligible clients to acquire basic skills as a basis for becoming employable. Cooperative sponsorship of adult credentialing programs make sense, since service to the uncredentialed and underemployed is a concern of both adult education and CETA efforts.

Generally, contractual agreements between sponsors are written to clarify the responsibilities of each party. A memorandum of agreement might include information about the goals of the collaboration, the population to be served and the nature of the fiscal policies. All budget expenditures and services to be provided by each group should be clarified in writing.

Planners will need to decide:

a. What kind of staffing is required for this program?

b. How will selection of advisory council members be made?

c. Who will sponsor the program and what will be the nature of the collaboration?

Financing

There are three types of funding needed to run an assessment program: seed money for planning and staff training costs, start-up funds for implementation, and maintenance funds for day-to-day operation.

Costs will vary with the type of service offered, hours of service, number and background of staff employed, and the type(s) of service that may be contributed by sponsor(s). For example, these might include rent or space for the program operation, and/or salaries of assessors, or administrators, counselors or aides. In-kind contributions such as the use of facilities or services, such as reproduction or telephone use.

Programs generally receive funding from several sources. These might include Federal funds from Adult Education (Section #310, Special Projects), local funds for Adult Eduction, CETA monies and/or contributions from business and industry. Since most programs are staffed by part-time people, working with clients by appointment, costs are reasonable. Assessors do not have to be certified teachers, since they do not instruct, but they must be trained for their jobs.

Collaboration

Written agreements between sponsors regarding both funds and services contributed by each party are essential for good program management. An agreement might include a program description and resources allocations; the expectations of each sponsor for the program; a detailed accounting of the fiscal policy; the responsibilities of the staff to each sponsor; and each sponsor's responsibilities of the program. The amount of funding and its distribution should be specified.

Collaboration extends well beyond fiscal responsibilities of cooperating sponsors, of course. Public relations efforts to promote the concept of a new credentialing program might be jointly planned. Staff from adult education programs, the local school committee, and representatives from business and industry and CETA agencies might participate in explaining their support of the effort. Certainly, representatives of these groups who serve on the Advisory Committee will take the time to understand the policies and procedures of an assessment program so that they can publicize it accurately.

Program planners must decide:

a. Who might sponsor the program and what kinds of contributions might they make?

b. What fiscal assurances are necessary to plan and implement a program?

c. What efforts can be made to promote the concept of an adult credentialing program?

Admissions Policy

Admissions policies usually address several concerns, including the age for participation in the program, the geographical area to be served, entry-level skill proficiency and policies about attendance and enrollment procedures.

1. *Age*

   The age for participation in alternative programs is established by communities and is influenced, in part, by the program requirements. Most programs require participants to be 18 years old, or younger with waivers, with no upper limit set. Many senior citizens have the time, the enthusiasm, and the skills to earn longed-for diplomas.

2. *Geographic Service Area*

   Programs establish geographic boundaries for service. These might include the local school district and also surrounding villages and towns, in a region defined perhaps by a CETA consortia. In these instances, a local high school agrees to provide its diploma to all who successfully complete assessment within the region. Assessment programs established on a regional basis become a cooperative venture for several communities.

3. *Entry Level Skills*

   Each program must decide what minimum levels of skills individuals must demonstrate to be eligible for the assessment programs. Since these programs focus on assessing skills on a level of competence which justifies awarding a diploma, persons with good skills are the appropriate target. Individuals who are unable to meet entry level skills requirements are referred to adult basic education programs where they can obtain help with basic reading, writing and computation. When their skills have improved sufficiently, they may want to apply again for the assessment program.

4. *Attendance and Enrollment*

   Competency-based assessment programs by their very definition, do not require attendance in formal classes, nor any set amount of time to be enrolled in a program. Theoretically, if individuals can demonstrate the required competencies to the standards, demonstrated performance is the criteria for awarding diploma. Thus, performance is fixed, and time spent in the program is variable, unlike traditional programs in which standards are variable,(grades of A or B or C) but time is fixed, (i.e., attendance for one semester, one course, twelve weeks, etc.).

   No major alternative diploma programs require enrollment for a fixed period or attendance in classes. All, however, have fixed standards for awarding the diploma. Generally, three to four months is the average time a candidate spends in assessment if the person has a job and home responsibilities which take precedence. Those in a hurry to earn a diploma for some reason can be easily accommodated by a competency-based program for they can be assessed anytime by appointment. As fast as they can demonstrate the requirements, they can complete the program.

Counseling

Counseling is an important part of any work with adult learners. Adults need counselors to better fit them to the right program; to give them information about the many available ways to earn a diploma; and to interpret results of diagnostic tests. Counselors also refer learners to appropriate instructional and other resources in the community and provide psychological and emotional support and friendship to adults involved in improving their lives through education.

Any good admissions policy will contain provisions for adequate counseling of participants.

Program planners must decide:

a. What age should be required for participation?

b. What geographic region should be served?

c. What entry level skills shall be required for participation?

d. What policy on enrollment and attendance shall be set?

e. What *is* "adequate" counseling?

f. How will adequate counseling be provided?

Recruitment and Public Relations

Participants are recruited in a number of ways. Media presentations on local TV, and radio spots are effective, as are newspaper advertisements, brochures and posters. When the first graduates complete the program, stories of their success can be printed in the local newspaper.

Local agencies that offer services to adults, such as PTA's, the Chamber of Commerce, churches, YWCA's, CETA, and senior citizens' organizations can be given material to distribute about the new program. And, of course, the advisory committee takes responsibility for program dissemination. Likewise, the local school committee and the superintendent contribute to furthering understanding and support for the program. Word-of-mouth is very effective for recruitment; satisfied graduates are ultimately the best public relations agents for any program.

Public relations activities are important to credentialing programs, because new procedures that certify individuals with a regular high school diploma need community support. Accurate information about it should be available to employees and local community colleges. Graduates will hunt for better jobs and will want to continue their education, using their diploma as evidence that they are high school graduates. Good promotion of the program can raise community awareness and acceptance.

One caution is necessary: take care not to misrepresent either the requirements or the process. Advertisements should include the fact that partial credit is granted for life experience or skills gained from life, if that is the case. If class attendance or some formal schooling is necessary, that information should also be stated clearly.

Program planners will need to ask:

a. What are the important characteristics of the program that should be advertised?

b. What radio or T.V. facilities can be used to advertise for and recruit learners?

c. What brochures, posters, newspaper ads need to be printed?

d. How can other community organizations be used to publicize the program?

Evaluation

Good evaluation of program effectiveness must be a planned activity. It should begin at the time of program implementation and continue throughout its operation. The data gathered provides information to refine the program, and to report its effectiveness to sponsors.

Record-keeping forms provide demographic data, and notes from staff and Advisory Council meetings can be helpful, too, in recording activities. A follow-up study of program graduates is a necessity, and so is information on the reasons given by candidates for not completing the program. Necessary adjustments to the program should be based on sound evaluation.

Program planners need to decide:

1. What components (i.e. the process of assessment, staff functioning, effects of program on participants) will be evaluated?

2. Who will supervise, and who will collect, the data?

3. How and when will data be collected?

4. How will it be analyzed?

5. Who will receive the results, and in what format?

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12. The National Diffusion Network (NDN) is funded by the United States Office of Education. Its purpose is to provide technical assistance to school districts interested in adopting educational programs that work. These programs are rigorously evaluated by a Joint Dissemination and Review Panel, with members from the Office of Education and the National Institute of Education. Two adult credentialing programs have been so validated: The Texas Competency-Based High School Diploma Program and the New York State External High School Diploma Program.

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SECTION III

I. AN ACTIVITIES CHECKLIST FOR PLANNERS

The following activities are involved when a community decides to plan a new credentialing program. The list of steps may not be inclusive, but in general, these are the important actions. Local situations may cause the order to vary somewhat, but the project director who is responsible for planning the new program can determine what order is appropriate for the local situation.

AN ACTIVITIES CHECKLIST

☐ 1. Conduct needs assessment

   a. review current options for adults to earn a high school diploma
   b. identify the population to be served by a new program

☐ 2. Select an advisory committee to design the philosophy of the program

☐ 3 Develop collaboration (roles and responsibilities) with sponsoring agents (State and local departments of adult education, local school board, CETA)

☐ 4. Establish a plan for financing a program

   a. seed money for planning
   b. start-up funds to implement the program
   c. maintenance funds

☐ 5. Review the appropriateness of local requirements for certification at the secondary level for adults

☐ 6. Select a model for adaption or adoption

   a. explore exemplary models and select an appropriate one

or

☐ 7. Design a model appropriate for the community, based on needs assessment

   a. select certification requirements
   b. design the assessment process

☐ 8. Develop appropriate programs, policies and procedures regarding admissions eligibility

   a. design the administrative structure

☐ 9. Identify the assessment techniques to be used and the guidelines for assessment procedures

☐ 10. Identify all types of instruction available in the community. Plan the referral or brokering system to be used to link learners with the resources they need.

☐ 11. Develop a record-keeping system for candidate intake, progress reports, and feedback

☐ 12. Plan the administrative structure

a. roles and function of staff
b. staff selection and training
c. salary and time commitments

☐ 13. Plan recruitment and publicity strategies

☐ 14. Develop final implementation plan

a. select site
b. hours of service, opening dates

☐ 15. Design an evaluation plan for formative evaluation

☐ 16. Begin implementation, testing out all components

☐ 17. Plan for long-term maintenance

☐ 18. Begin evaluation of program and plan for follow-up studies of graduates

II. NEWSLETTERS AND MATERIALS

Clearinghouse for Applied Performance Testing (CAPT)
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
719 Southwest Second Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204

This free newsletter, published quarterly, addresses issues in applied performance testing, including research and practice. An annotated bibliography of applied performance tests is also available.

National Center for Educational Brokering (NCEB)
405 Oak Street
Syracuse, New York 13203

This newsletter is published 4 times a year at a small subscription fee. It reports on activities across the nation related to educational brokering, the linking of adult learners to resources.

Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning (CAEL)
American City Building
Columbia, MA 21044

Monographs and articles on a wide variety of issues and practices related to assessment of experiential learning. Although written for colleges and universities, guidelines and principles apply to adult credentialing programs. A nominal fee is charged for materials. Particularly useful are these two monographs: Joan Knapp and Amial Sharon, *A Compendium of Assessment Techniques and* Warren Willingham, *Principles of Good Practice in Assessing Experiential Learning*

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APPENDEX I

EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS - COMMONWEALTH

CITY	TYPE	CONTACT	ADDRESS	INFORMATION
BOSTON	NEW YORK EXTERNAL ADOPTER	Ed Joyce, Director ADP	Boston School Committee 26 Court Street Boston, Ma 02108 617—726-6485	Sponsor: Boston School Department
CAMBRIDGE	LOCALLY DEVELOPED	Mark Hinderlie, Head Teacher	Community Learning Center 614 Massachusetts Avenue Cambridge, MA 02139 617—547-1589	Sponsor: Cambridge School Department
LAWRENCE	NEW YORK EXTERNAL ADOPTER	James Walsh, Malbine Shaheen Co-Directors	External Diploma Program Adult Learning Center 514 Essex Street Lawrence, MA 01840 617—682-7006	Sponsor: Lawrence School Department
LOWELL	LOCALLY DEVELOPED	Fred Abisi, Elizabeth Tzapanzaris Co-Directors	Lowell ADP Lowell High School Annex Paige Street Lowell, MA 01852 617—458-9007	Sponsor: Lowell School Department

CITY	TYPE	CONTACT	ADDRESS	INFORMATION
NEW BEDFORD	LOCALLY DEVELOPED	Elaine Feingold, ADP Director	Adult Diploma Program 181 Hillman Street New Bedford, MA 01740 617—992-3012	Co-Sponsors: New Bedford CETA Consortia/New Bedford School Department
SALEM	NEW YORK EXTERNAL ADOPTER	Alan Huberman, Coordinator	Salem SAETA ADP 84 Highland Ave. Salem, MA 01970 617—745-9280 ext. 285	Sponsor: Salem CETA Consortia
SOMERVILLE	NEW YORK EXTERNAL ADOPTER	Don Baptiste, Ann Sheehan Coordinators	External Diploma Project SCALE 99 Dover Street Davis Square Somerville, MA 02144 617—625-1335	Sponsor: Project SCALE, Somerville Somerville School Department
WORCESTER	TEXAS APL ADOPTER	Helen Paduch, Naomi Mandell Head Teachers	APL Diploma Program 214 Worcester Center Worchester, MA 01608 617—757-7478	Sponsor: Worcester Adult Learning Center, Worcester School Department